



# Inspiring Artistry Repertoire Project

A Piano Magazine subscriber-exclusive digital resource

**Leonidas Lagrimas presents:**

**“Improvisation No. 1” from *Five Improvisations* Op. 148, No. 1 by Amy Beach**

## Process and Practice

**Fully present:** tips for maintaining focus and engagement over time

- Encourage the student to discover multiple interpretations of this music and to choose one that is the true means of their individual expression.
- Discover how the essence of this piece changes depending on physical factors in the environment (space, type of piano, etc.)
- Beach's piano music can be purposefully ambiguous and vague in nature – this can be used to encourage expressive playing!

**Break it up:** useful practice segments; how to connect them and plug them back into the whole

- Note where themes and motifs occur to identify places for isolated practice.
- Example: the main theme of mm. 1-4 recurs in mm. 34-37 in its entirety, just transposed up an octave.
- Mm. 1-3 and 34-36 also offer excellent opportunities to practice voicing and phrasing.
- At m. 31, many students will struggle with executing the LH rolled chord smoothly. Apply varying degrees of rubato, both leading into the chord and within the roll of the chord itself, in order to ensure a smooth execution without accents or heaviness.

**Layers and outlines:** tips for focusing on how the parts makeup the whole

- Generally speaking, the piece takes on an ABA' form as follows: A: Main theme, mm. 1-16. B: Second theme, mm. 17-33. A': Main theme transposed up one octave, mm. 34-end. There is then a coda-like section mm. 43-end.
- Find spots where the piece takes on a canonic quality, or where the textures become vaguely round-like in form.
- Isolate these canonic ideas from the surrounding texture and listen for them in practice.

**Achieving flow:** ideas for finding and maintaining tempo, managing modifications artistically

- Allow a natural sense of momentum to take over with some phrases, much like the natural ebb and flow of speech.
- Take note of the rather ambiguous direction *sempre con pedale* in measure 7.
- Recognize that pedaling in works like this will be a highly personal exercise, one that cannot necessarily be notated on paper.
- Tempo should be flexible as needed in performance in order to achieve a flowing sound without heavy downbeats or accents. Imagine a waltz or other dance-like piece.

- Even at the *ppp* level, maintaining a solid sense of tonal color and physical control is an absolute must.

**Make it mine:** tips for developing and refining a personal, internal sense of the piece

- From the earliest stages of learning, students should be encouraged to explore the expressive possibilities of this music.
- Imagine this Improvisation as film score music to connect to a programmatic interpretation.
- What is happening in the movie where this music is being used? What is the location? What is the mood? Who are the characters? What is the dialogue?

**Deep knowing:** tips for securing memory

- Separate the melodic layers from one another.
- Pay careful attention to voice-leading.
- Find sequence-like areas in which motives and ideas are taken through chromatic transpositions but are otherwise identical.

**Final stages:** tips for ensuring performance readiness, maintaining freshness and spontaneity, and reinforcing an expressive personal connection

- Take on an improvisatory mindset in performance to capture the ambiguous, open-ended spirit of the piece.
- Experiment with flexibility in performance with elements such as tempo, phrasing, and pulse.
- Encourage the student to not worry about one “right way” to perform this work and to feel free to express themselves in the moment.
- Physical freedom without constraint will help their successful performance. Have students practice bodily motions such as light swaying or deep breaths while playing.